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Terror—From Iran

The Reagan administration's restraint in retaliating against international terrorists, despite repeated bold talk, is puzzling. It has been demonstrated unmistakably that the leaders of Iran, the country responsible for most American deaths by terrorism, are afraid of U.S. military wrath.

On two separate occasions the Iranians or their Syrian allies scrambled to end a hostage situation when it became clear that the United States had set military intervention in motion. Yet each time the White House pulls back from the Rubicon, the Shiite Moslem terror-masters grow cockier.

The first incident, a full account of which has remained bottled up in secret intelligence files, occurred when Iranian-controlled Shiite gunmen hijacked Kuwait Air Lines Flight 221 before dawn on Dec. 4, 1984, and flew it to Tehran. Two of the four Americans aboard were to die before the incident ended.

Shortly after noon that day, Western intelligence services learned of a conversation between a foreign ministry official in Tehran and Ayatollah

Ali Akbar Mohtashami, Iranian ambassador to Syria. Two things became clear: Iran controlled the hijackers, and Iranian officials were nervous about a U.S. military response.

Mohtashami, who is believed by the CIA to have been involved in several of the worst anti-American terrorist operations in the Middle East, recommended that the hijacked Kuwaiti airliner be flown to Beirut, where pro-Iranian Hezbollah and Islamic Amal groups could protect it from a U.S. strike.

Tipped off to the hijackers' possible move and the Iranians' intention to allow the Americans to be killed, U.S. officials immediately put the crack, 90-man, anti-terrorist Delta Force on alert at Fort Bragg, N.C.

The order to move out came on Dec. 7. President Reagan arrived in the White House situation room at 1:11 p.m. for a detailed briefing on the hijacking. National Security Council officials told the president it appeared the plane would be flown to Beirut; the command was given to send Delta Force on its way.

The commando team flew to West Germany.

They were in position—within a two-hour flight of Beirut airport—by mid-morning Dec. 9. The carrier Nimitz and other Navy support forces were off the Lebanese coast ready for action.

But the strike was forestalled by the Iranians. Shortly before midnight on Dec. 8, the security forces at Tehran airport suddenly came to life and staged a "rescue" operation that injured none of the terrorists.

The second incident occurred last June after the hijacking of TWA Flight 847. Once Syrian and Lebanese Shiite officials allied with the Iranians realized Delta Force was finally going to strike, the TWA hostages were set free.

The administration's failure to wreak actual retaliation against Iran is even more puzzling in light of the gruesome "body count" of Americans killed in terrorist actions.

Libya, the target of the administration's rhetorical wrath, was probably involved in some stage of the Rome and Vienna airport massacres, in which five Americans happened to be among those killed. Yet Iranians and their hirelings have been responsible for the murders of 264 Americans—and the victims were killed because they were Americans.

Far from being punished for their undeclared war on American citizens, the Iranian fanatics have been "rewarded" by tough talk from the White House, which only puffs up their warped egos.

In April 1983, a suicide bomber with Iranian connections blew up the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, killing 17 Americans. Six months later, another Iranian-trained terrorist blew up the Marine barracks at Beirut airport, killing 241 Marines.

Two more Americans died in the 1984 bombing of the Beirut embassy; two were killed in the Kuwaiti airliner hijacking; and a Navy diver was murdered last June in the hijacking of TWA Flight 847. Iranian-backed terrorists continue to hold four American hostages in Lebanon. The evidence of Iran's responsibility is substantial.

Yet to this day, the United States has done nothing to punish the Iranian terrorists and government officials who have engineered the killings of 264 Americans and the repeated humiliation of the United States.

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